

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BONN 02635 01 OF 02 111543Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 /086 W
-----111628Z 009309 /46

P R 111530Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5564
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USBERLIN
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL BREMEN
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL HAMBURG
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 02635

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: PROBLEMS IN THE OPPOSITION CAMP

BEGIN SUMMARY: CDU/CSU BUNDESTAG DEPUTIES GATHERED IN
BAD GODESBERG FEBRUARY 9 TO CELEBRATE THE GERMAN
"KARNEVAL" SEASON. ONE OF THE HUMOROUS SPEAKERS
PLAYED THE PART OF A "PRAVDA" REPORTER WHO RETURNS
TO BONN 25 YEARS FROM NOW. HE STOPS THE FIRST PASSER-BY
HE MEETS AND ASKS HIM, "PARDON ME, DOES KOHL STILL WANT
TO BE CHANCELLOR?" REPORTEDLY, THE JOKE BROUGHT THE
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PAGE 02 BONN 02635 01 OF 02 111543Z

HOUSE DOWN, BUT SOME UNION DEPUTIES FEAR THERE MAY BE
A GRAIN OF TRUTH IN THE JOKE. KOHL'S PERFORMANCE IN THE
BUNDESTAG HAS BEEN LACKLUSTER AND THE OPPOSITION IS NOT
AS WELL OFF AS IT SHOULD BE, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE
GOVERNMENT'S BLUNDERING. END SUMMARY.

1. ON ELECTION NIGHT AND FOR SOME MONTHS THEREAFTER,

HELMUT KOHL EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE SPD/FDP COALITION BROKE UP AND HE BECAME FEDERAL CHANCELLOR. AS OF LATE, HOWEVER, HE IS CALLING FOR THE OPPOSITION TO PLAN ON A FULL FOUR-YEAR LEGISLATIVE PERIOD BEFORE THE CDU/CSU WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE OVER THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT. PRIVATELY HE STILL MAINTAINS THAT THERE IS A 60:40 CHANCE THE LIBERALS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WILL HAVE A FALLING OUT BEFORE 1980, BUT THAT IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE OPPOSITION, FOR REASONS OF EFFECTIVENESS, TO PROCEED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE IT THROUGH THE FULL LEGISLATIVE PERIOD.

2. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT SOME OF THE EUPHORIA EXISTING IN THE OPPOSITION CAMP AS A RESULT OF THE INEPT BEGINNING OF THE SECOND SCHMIDT/GENSCHER GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR AS THE POLITICAL SITUATION RETURNED TO NORMAL IN BONN. THE DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENT DECLARATION, WHICH TOOK PLACE AFTER THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAY RECESS, SHOWED SCHMIDT TO BE BACK IN FIGHTING FORM AND THE COALITION TO HAVE PULLED ITSELF BACK TOGETHER AGAIN, AT LEAST FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

3. PERHAPS THE MOST DISTURBING FACTOR FOR SOME UNION POLITICIANS IS WHAT THEY FEEL IS A MEDIOCRE PERFORMANCE BY KOHL AS FRAKTION LEADER. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC DEPUTIES REPRESENTING BOTH THE LEFT AND RIGHT WINGS HAVE TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT THEY FEEL HELMUT KOHL HAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BONN 02635 01 OF 02 111543Z

STILL TO MEASURE UP TO THE JOB AS OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE BUNDESTAG. EVEN HIS FRIENDS IN THE FRAKTION FEEL THAT HE HAS YET TO DIG IN AND DO THE NECESSARY HOMEWORK TO PREPARE HIMSELF FOR DEBATES.

4. THE WOUNDS RESULTING FROM THE KREUTH DECISION HAVE NOT HEALED, AND KEY CSU POLITICIANS ARE NOW PUTTING OUT THE LINE THAT BIEDENKOPF MAY BE DIFFICULT AT TIMES BUT AT LEAST HE IS VERY INTELLIGENT. AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE EXTREMELY NEGATIVE ABOUT KOHL. THIS MAY BE PARTLY THE RESULT OF THEIR UNHAPPINESS WITH KOHL'S POSITION DURING THE KREUTH DISPUTE, BUT IT POINTS UP THE FACT THAT THE CSU HAS NOT FULLY ACCEPTED KOHL AS THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION.

5. THE UNHAPPINESS WITH THE CDU CHAIRMAN IS ALSO A REFLECTION OF THE FRUSTRATION SOME UNION DEPUTIES FEEL ABOUT KOHL'S STYLE OF LEADERSHIP. THESE CONSERVATIVE CRITICS FEAR THAT KOHL IS TOO WEAK TO LEAD THE

OPPOSITION SUCCESSFULLY AGAINST A SUBSTANTIVE HEAVY-
WEIGHT LIKE HELMUT SCHMIDT. THEY POINT TO KOHL'S
PROPENSITY TO AVOID CONFRONTATION WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY
RATHER THAN SEE HIS POLICIES THROUGH. IN A COUNTRY
WHERE THE ABILITY TO GET THINGS DONE IS CONSIDERED A
CRITICAL POLITICAL TALENT, KOHL'S TACTIC OF TAKING THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 02635

COMPROMISE WAY OUT IS SEEN AS A MAJOR POLITICAL WEAKNESS.

6. KURT BIEDENKOPF HAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL BE A
CANDIDATE FOR THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE NORTH RHINE-
WESTPHALIA CDU. THIS IS EXPECTED TO BE THE FIRST STEP
IN HIS CAMPAIGN TO CAPTURE THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NRW

CDU. AT THE PRESENT TIME, BIEDENKOPF'S FRIENDS AND FOES
IN THE UNION PARTIES ARE BETTING THAT HE WILL SUCCEED
KOEPLER AS CDU PARTY BOSS IN NRW.
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PAGE 02 BONN 02635 02 OF 02 111546Z

7. OBSERVERS FEEL THAT KOEPLER WILL NOT BE ABLE TO
FIGHT OFF BIEDENKOPF'S CHALLENGE. JUST WHAT FORMER
FRAKTION CHAIRMAN AND CHANCELLOR-CANDIDATE BARZEL WILL
DO ABOUT BIEDENKOPF'S AMBITIONS IN NRW REMAINS AN OPEN
QUESTION. RECENTLY THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS, AT LEAST
IN THE SPD, THAT BARZEL MAY RUN AS CANDIDATE FOR
GOVERNING MAYOR IN BERLIN FOR 1979. SUCH A SOLUTION
WOULD HAVE SOME APPEAL FOR THE CDU BECAUSE IT COULD SOLVE
ITS LEADERSHIP PROBLEM IN THE DIVIDED CITY AND AT THE
SAME TIME AVOID A BLOODY BIEDENKOPF-BARZEL
CONFRONTATION IN NRW.

8. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WILL
CREATE PROBLEMS FOR THE CDU AT THE NATIONAL PARTEITAG
MARCH 7-9. THERE REMAINS DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO
GROUPS IN THE UNION PARTIES ABOUT WHICH STRATEGY THE
OPPOSITION SHOULD PURSUE IN ORDER TO GAIN POWER. THE
ONE GROUP, EXEMPLIFIED BY ALBRECHT AND KIEP (AND MORE
OR LESS SUPPORTED BY KOHL), RECOMMENDS FOLLOWING LIBERAL
POLICIES THAT COULD EVENTUALLY ATTRACT THE FDP AWAY
FROM THE SOCIAL/LIBERAL COALITION. THE OTHER, LED BY
DREGGER, FILBINGER, STRAUSS, ET AL., WHICH REPRESENTS
THE MAJORITY VIEW IN THE FRAKTION, BELIEVES THAT THE
OPPOSITION SHOULD HOLD TO CLEAR, CONSERVATIVE POLICIES
WHICH HAVE PROVEN SUCCESSFUL AT THE POLLS OVER THE PAST
FEW YEARS. SUCH A STRATEGY, THEY BELIEVE, WILL ENABLE
THE UNION PARTIES TO WIN THE ELECTION IN 1980.

9. THE LATTER GROUP FEELS THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE OF
INDUCING THE FDP TO LEAVE THE PRESENT COALITION SHORT
OF SACRIFICING BASIC UNION POLICIES. A CASE IN POINT,
THEY FEEL, IS THE LOWER SAXONY COALITION AGREEMENT.
SHOULD THIS AGREEMENT, WHICH THEY FEEL WAS A CDU SELL-
OUT, RESULT IN A DIVIDED CDU/CSU OPPOSITION IN THE
BUNDESRAT, THE OPPOSITION WILL HAVE SERIOUS DIFFI-
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PAGE 03 BONN 02635 02 OF 02 111546Z

CULTIES MAINTAINING CREDIBILITY WITH THE GERMAN VOTERS.

10. THEREFORE, WHEN THE CDU MEETS NEXT MONTH FOR THE

25TH BUNDESPARTEITAG, THE OPPOSITION'S SITUATION WILL NOT BE AS STRONG AND UNITED AS IT SHOULD PERHAPS BE, GIVEN THE ELECTION RESULTS LAST OCTOBER IN THE BUNDESTAG ELECTION AND THE DIFFICULTIES THE GOVERNMENT COALITION FACES IN BONN. ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS THAT WILL TROUBLE THE DELEGATES IS WHETHER KOHL, WHO IS EFFECTIVE IN POLITICAL PARTY OPERATIONS AND IN PERSONAL CONTACTS, AND WHO HIMSELF REMAINS BUOYANTLY OPTIMISTIC IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, CAN MANAGE THE OPPOSITION EFFECTIVELY FOR SEVERAL SENSITIVE YEARS. STOESEL

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